Mch 29, 1914

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
Matt 11. 15.

This is one of the characteristic and oft-repeated exhortations of the New Testament, which we must suppose to be something more than a formal phrase. In the older prophetic writings we find the same exhortation used, over and over, only perhaps more tersely put: "Hear ye!" "Hear O Israel!" "Hear the word of the Lord." Both the prophets and the Evangelists make reference repeatedly to those who having ears hear not. Sometimes it seems to them as if God himself, for a purpose of his own, had dulled the sense of hearing, so that the word of life might not be taken to heart.

In all this one sees their recognition of the difficulty of getting the world's attention. As the town crier used to ring his bell to attract notice to the announcement he wished to make, so they cry "Hear! Hear!" "He that has ears let him hear". It is of no use to talk to people; to set before them any kind of good news, or any truth of salvation, if they are not paying attention.

How often, in our conversations with others, we can tell, from their expression, that they are not ~~thinking~~ giving any heed what we say! How often it comes to us, with a shock of surprise and mortification, that we have not been ~~hearing~~ listening to what people were saying to us. Our mind has suddenly gone off on some affair of their own, and we do not know what the last few ~~syllables~~ sentences spoken to us have been. Our ears, no ~~doubt~~ doubt, have performed their office, but their report to our consciousness has been utterly neglected.

The habit of attention is slowly formed and sometimes not ~~not always~~ easy to command. Not always can the mind's notice be continuously held, even by that in which it is ~~especially~~ much interested. Even then, it is liable to be diverted ~~the~~ by some external occurrence, or some inward train of thought, so that it misses quite a little of what it was really ~~eager~~ desirous to hear.

Much more when what is offered to its inspection has no close connection with its usual habits of thought, and it is rather bored by statements and considerations which do not seem to bear on its

immediate pursuits, the mind is apt not to pay sufficient heed ~~to them~~ to know what ~~they~~ such statements truly are. At this moment, I should guess, some of those who hear me speaking are quite as busy with ~~[illegible]~~ suggestions which the words thus far ~~supplied~~ used may have started in their ~~[illegible]~~ minds, as with the point that I am endeavouring to make.

There is a theory which has seemed to me quite reasonable, though I am altogether ignorant of its value as a working hypothesis, that certain cases of Total deafness are nothing else ~~at bottom but~~ ~~a form~~ in their origin, but what might be called a ~~[illegible]~~ lack of the habit of ~~in~~attention. We all know how oblivious we can be to a sound, like that of the ticking of a clock, while we are closely occupied with ~~some pursuit~~ what we are reading or doing; and how impossible it is to inhibit or shut out ~~the~~ our awareness of that sound, when our ~~attention~~ notice has been called to it; in the silence of night how dreadfully oppressive a trifling noise can be, if once we have allowed it to become a definite annoyance; and how ~~oblivious~~ untroubled we are by sounds ~~definite annoyance~~ of considerable magnitude, when use has dulled our notice of them!

Now the theory is that, in some instances, early childhood does not form the habit of attending to the sensation of sound. It lives,

as one might live in the presence of the roar of a great cataract, getting so ~~used~~ accustomed to it as never to mind it. One can see that if this were the case,— and a child never really made use of its ears, the faculty of hearing ~~never would~~ might not be developed, though its organs ~~of hearing~~ for that sense had been perfectly formed.

Whether or not some amount of physical deafness is to be thus accounted for I do not know. But if the theory will hold, it ought to have some limited value; and in any event it will serve very well as an illustration of what I am quite sure does take place within the realm of our spiritual life. There must be an immense amount of spiritual reality to which we are deaf, simply because we have no habit of attending to such impressions as it makes upon us.

Suppose that another world exists ~~[illegible]~~ quite close about us; that intimations of its presence are always being brought to us; that influences and agencies from that source are ~~always~~ constantly assailing us! ~~We might be entirely~~ All this might ~~[illegible]~~ be so, and yet we might remain unaware of ~~this~~ it, if we had no habit of attention to ~~such~~ the impressions ~~made upon us~~ thus produced. ~~More than this, mankind might have been over [illegible]~~

Such I myself believe to be the fact. The life in us is, in some sense, continuous with an infinite life surrounding us. Our minds have their existence in the embrace of an universal mind. We who live here are encompassed also by what [illegible] is spoken of in our scriptures as "a cloud of witnesses": by those who not only watch our behavior, but send into our hearts, impulses and impressions that have much to do with our safety and success along this earthly pilgrimage.

Of the reality of this other world, where souls "that have been delivered from the burden of the flesh" enter into the nearer presence of God, I am convinced by many converging lines of experience and reflection; and there can be no reasonable doubt, I think, of the continual presence also of the Holy Spirit, which is the life of all that is.

It must be that influences from that other world, and this greater spirit, are coming to us all the time; and we know it not, or scarcely at all

take note of them, because our attention is so little turned in that direction.

Man really behaves like a being who, largely without his knowledge, ~~and~~ or even against his will, is driven and directed by incentives and inclinings put into him from this higher source. Man, it has been well said, as the highest of animals, is not a success. With all his superior gifts he does not appear to enjoy this earthly existence as much as do the squirrels and the birds. He does not fathom his own unrest. He is led forward by ideals that he can neither reach nor let go. He is subject to inward promptings that have nothing to do with his worldly advantage and prosperity; which indeed compel him, now and then, to make utter sacrifice of his worldly interests, ~~that~~ that he may ~~be~~ yield to the dictates of honor and rectitude.

In a hundred ways man shows himself to be more or less under the domination of great tides of being over and beyond himself, which will not altogether be denied their purpose to have their way with him.

His conscience, for example, is subject, like the compass, to many strange variations; but who can doubt that, also like that, its main determinations are governed by forces that play upon him out of the infinite. For it is no quality shut up within the magnetic needle itself that enables it to maintain its constant direction toward the North. It is the needle's response to currents of magnetism encircling the whole globe which makes it the mariner's guide across pathless seas.

So our moral nature has always been rightly regarded, by our greatest thinkers, as evidence that man was under the direction and guidance of unseen powers. The form of what we call duty has been decided by ages of experience, but the authority of duty is, like the force of gravitation, a hand reaching down to us from the Universe at large to hold us in our place.

Such considerations as these appeal to us in moments of reflection, but we are not apt to feel them very much in the thick of

life's conflict and stress. After the battle is over we can look back and begin to realize that there must have been one, unseen, standing by our side, to nerve our arm and strengthen our heart. But, at the moment, we probably had little sense of such divine guidance and support. Then, the roar of tempest and earthquake was so much in our ears, ~~and~~ that we could not hear the "still small voice".

And we need not take ~~too much~~ overmuch shame to ourselves that, though having ears we hear so little of those counsels and admonitions sent to us from ~~heaven~~ above, when we remember the cry of Christ on the cross "My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!" Though he had so long walked in daily and hourly communion with his Father in heaven, it would seem that there came a time, in the midst of his anguish, when he could no longer feel the clasp of that father's hand.

I have always myself marveled at the strange Providence which has preserved in the brief record of his life that cry, wrung from him on the cross; ~~in the so brief record of his life~~; as if it had been foreseen what influences would be at work to cloud

and obscure his essential humanity; and there would be need of this evidence that he belonged, after all, among the world of men.

But if he for a moment* found the heavens as brass above him, and could hear no accent of the Father's voice supporting him in his great ~~struggle~~ trial, we need not think it too strange, or shameful, that this voice should always be speaking to us, while we seldom recognize its tones. Our attention is strongly held by a multitude of objects and interests belonging to this lower world. We are not likely to hear anything else, save as our notice is somewhat detached from this engagement, and focused on that other world, whence the higher guidance may be supposed to come.

The idea that, if there be any reality in the religious view of existence, then the voice of heaven should, as it were, break through all other sounds to capture and hold our attention; that God ought to come to us in ways which we cannot possibly escape or evade, is manifestly ~~a~~ wrong and

foolish, ~~ideas~~. There is no possibility that we should hear, until our ears are opened in this particular direction. We must attend to what the Spirit is saying, if we would hear the Spirit speak; and it is probable that the education of an inward faculty for receiving and interpreting, consciously, such tokens as the Spirit sends, is as slow and laborious as the acquisition of a faculty for outward hearing.

But if we have reason to believe that our life, in its greater determinations, is mainly swayed by influences that play upon us from an unseen source; ~~ends~~ if that ~~we are~~ there is a Providence which shapes our ends, and that we are ~~supported~~ upheld and directed by movements communicated to us from a spiritual ~~source~~ world, then there are two considerations that ought to appeal to us with ~~great~~ tremendous force.

One of these considerations is that, in ~~early~~ earlier days, when men were less absorbed with all sorts of intricate problems belonging to the present hour, their life was more open to suggestions from on high; they were more aware of the presence of a

holy Spirit; this inward ear was better attuned to "celestial voices; and that there is therefore a kind of authority in the ancient prophetic "Thus saith the Lord", because it comes from a type of mind better able than ours to feel ~~the~~ ~~the~~ an immediate divine presence, and to interpret its will for the children of men.

And the other consideration is that among life's multifold endeavors, we ought not to neglect the attempt to keep ourselves in touch with spiritual values, and responsive to the influence which those values continually exert upon us. For, if it be true that the best guidance of our life proceeds from that higher source, then no one can put into words, more exactly, the great trouble, and hindrance, and difficulty under which our world continually labors, than as the matter is phrased in that Confession which we have repeatedly taken upon our lips, "We have followed, too much, the devices of our own hearts";

We live, too much, as if it were for us to invent the system of things under which the world's work shall be done; to determine for ourselves,

the main paths of our action, and to do what we will with the opportunities left in our hands. If there be no good Spirit and no world of spirits, above or round about ~~us~~ us, then what help there is for a distressed humanity we must find in ourselves; and we are then free to use the tools of science in any way that may seem good in our sight. But if ~~if~~ there be a wisdom, greater than our own, which has plans for us, then it should be the first object of our life to find out what that wisdom teaches, and ~~to~~ to yield ourselves to its sway; and in no wise can we more effectually block its beneficent purposes than by setting up our own little plans, ~~and~~ insisting that they shall be carried out at whatever cost. I have, at this late hour, been reading a book, much talked about, and one that seems destined to exert considerable influence on existing currents of thought; I find, when ~~there~~ among many ideas that are likely to produce a liberating and enlightening effect, one assumption rather calculated to confirm a very bad habit of thinking quite prevalent at the present day. I find the preface of this book saying:

talking about a social and industrial system, said to be seemingly iniquitous, as if certain men, quite deficient in moral character, had made that system, and were responsible for it; and as if it were for other men, of good moral character, to devise another system, under which the bad results, ~~which~~ that everybody ought to lament, cannot come to pass.

Now in point of fact, I take it, no man and no set of men ever did invent the system of things under which we live. The notion that this ever has been, or ever will be possible, is pure fiction. That system has grown out of the life of the world, and Every system that comes into use in the future will have to grow out of the ~~life of the~~ world's life.

We can do something, by laws that we enact, to govern men in the use of what nature and natural growth have furnished us. But the supposition that men in the past have been able to plan out and put in force what is now called a bad social system, and that it remains for men

in the future to plan out and put in force another and different kind of system, indicates a habit of thought which has altogether lost the sense of dependence upon higher powers in such affairs, and rests under the impression that, by taking thought, it can solve the whole problem for itself.

Now what is the evidence that the system is wrong? All we have real right to say is that bad men make bad use of it. Is it not likely to remain true that bad men will continue to make bad use of any system? How long an experience of making laws and then seeing ingenious minds deftly circumvent those laws, will it take, to convince us that the kingdom of heaven does not come that way!

I am ready to grant that something of importance can be ~~effected~~ achieved by wise and careful legislation, yet no law has ever yet availed to stop the commission of crime, and I insist that the real solution of the world's problem is not to be worked out in that fashion. I would not have any effort to perfect the outward arrangements of our in the future to plan out a different system which will be attended by none of the unfortunate results to be now noted, is I should say one of the goals and [illegible] happy failures of the present hour.

life omitted; but I would have people realize that, along with this, there must be constant endeavor to get the inward life in accord with the high purposes of the spirit, if any real advance toward a better day is to be ~~[illegible]~~ made.

The view of existence which the wisest teachers of our race have always set forth, and insisted upon, is that a divine wisdom, and a divine love, are forever pressing in upon this humanity of ours, seeking to shape human impulses and aspirations into closer agreement with its own heavenly life. But not much can be done in this way save as man himself becomes aware of the source of his life, opens his heart to receive it, and gives himself to the tides of the spirit that would bear him up and lead him on.

The higher powers can reach our hearts, to fill them with a feeling that something is demanded of them, they know not what; to produce in them a quivering discontent and unrest, like a young bird fluttering its wings on the

edge of its world: but they cannot do much more than this till we begin to understand what they want of us and to commit ourselves to their guidance.

We have been made on a plan too large for this present life of ours. We are like children, playing their games, and deriving much enjoyment from them; yet always against a vague background of longings and intimations which mark out toward some larger life beyond. We know that there is something in us, not here provided for; which never can be satisfied with these lower aims and ambitions.

It is the spirit within us, ~~longing for~~ hungering for the freedom and joy of a larger spiritual life; and I know of no other atheism or infidelity, no blasphemy so black, as to say that this greatest part of our being is nothing but a dream, and that there are no spiritual values where this highest that is in us can reach its fulfilment, and find its own.

In his most recent book, Prof. Eucken has made what seems to me the profoundest study and analysis of contemporary currents of life

Thus far publ.

before us, At least his dealing with tendencies in that part of the religious sense with which I am most familiar has a summary and accuracy of touch, by which I am much amazed, since he himself has little personal familiarity with that special field of work,

He speaks of the "preponderating tendency of modern science to take the nature around us for the whole of reality, and allow it to swallow up our soul-life utterly." "The social movement" he says, "works in the same direction, of suppressing and absorbing the inner by the outer; Economic problems and the material welfare of man are given precedence over everything else." The Aestheticism and Epicureanism of the time, again, "push the inner life far into the background," All this work, which aims to modify the external conditions of life has a tendency to reduce man to a mere bundle of impressions and sensibilities, "to destroy the freedom of the soul and to make even the quest for it seem meaningless,"

And such tendencies of the age, he declares are all the more dangerous because they are often

to assume a kind of infallibility, by having "behind them a record of production achievement, the principle of which is beyond dispute"; the writer would have any of this attempt to ameliorate life's external conditions stopped, but he would have men see that life is always more than its ~~[illegible]~~ external conditions; that it is really centred in an inward world, and that it is, in the end, fatal if we allow ourselves to be driven from that to the mere circumference of things.

His plea and his call is for a new Christianity, which is, he says, indispensable to the future welfare of our race. Whereas the older Christianity had one definite and clear cut idea, that of a lost world restored through the mediation and atonement of Christ, an idea which has become impossible to modern thought, he would have the new Christianity base itself on an equally definite and simple conception, — that of a spiritual humanity emerging from the lower life of mankind, through struggle and contest, and fighting its way to

supremacy over all other human interests and desires, this Spiritual humanity, as he sees the matter, is as much a new creation as was man himself when he first appeared among animals. And it is not anything that rests wholly in our keeping, for the whole weight of the Universe is back of it, as it pushes its way up through the crust of old custom and tradition that it has to break.

The Christianity which bases itself on this idea is not a new invention of our own, for it has only to go back to the original gospel of Christ to find abundant sanction, and it can see itself faithfully portrayed in his teaching, though in a somewhat different dress. The purpose of Christianity from the start has been to make a new humanity; one dominated not by the passions of the flesh but by the power of the spirit.

Give up the idea that this can be accomplished by a sudden and miraculous process; make it the sublime and heroic task of the ages to achieve that result, and once more the Church can take up its work of putting a soul into

the complex machinery of the world's life. Do not dream that the man who insists upon living as if he, and all other men, were selfish animals, can be cured by a law; but see that he has to be converted to the higher aims and satisfactions of spiritual life.

Then realize that this new humanity, toward which we strive, has cosmic significance; because it is the next step in that creative work which the Universe itself is doing on this planet of ours, and has behind it the force and purpose of that universal Spirit, out of which all things have come. He who once taught men the way of life in Galilee and Jerusalem is perfectly fitted to be the hero of this new venture of human faith. It was his own thought, as nearly as that thought can be translated out of one age and ~~time~~ place into a different age and ~~time~~ place; and it will be no degradation of him, from a high office which the world has hitherto assigned him, but new

honor for his name. To make him, ~~the head of~~ as the greatest man of history ~~a movement~~ the head of a movement which professes that God and man ~~and God~~ shall at last become one.

Such is the vision of one of the greatest minds of our generation; and the key to it is his firm conviction of the reality of that spiritual world, above us and beneath us, which slowly rises into our being, to transform us into the likeness of itself. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. This larger life cannot take possession of us without our glad consent. We are its children; but we remain both deaf and blind till by our effort to see and hear, we allow its messages to reach our inmost consciousness. Do not think to prove God by any sign from heaven. He that cometh to Him must, first of all, believe that he is, and, believing, turn his thought and desire to that best source of comfort and help. Then, unless all the greatest prophets of all the ages are mistaken, man shall know for what he was born, and to what high destiny he may aspire.